

Long Live the King Sermon Series
#5 – The Death of David’s Son
2 Sam. 18
Aug. 20, 2006

A minister told his congregation, “Next week I plan on preaching about the sin of lying. To help you understand my sermon, I want you all to read Mark 17 this week.” The following Sunday, as the minister stepped into the pulpit, he said, “Last week I asked you all to do some reading in preparation for this sermon. Now, how many people here read Mark 17 this past week like I asked? Please be honest.” After a few seconds, hands started going up until everyone in the sanctuary had their hand raised. The minister smiled and said, “Mark only has sixteen chapters. I will now proceed with my sermon on the sin of lying.” That’s why I don’t give any reading assignments from the pulpit; I don’t want you to be tempted.

Our sins, no matter how big or how small, have consequences. If we make the choice to not address the sinfulness that exists in our lives, then we have to be prepared to face whatever consequences occur because of that. In college, a friend of mine named Tom had a problem with his car. His “check engine” light came on and wouldn’t go off. I was always a bit afraid to ride with Tom, but he assured me it was no big deal. One day I got in his car and noticed the “check engine” light had gone off, so I asked him how he fixed it. He reached over to the dashboard and pulled off a piece of black electrical tape that he had put over the light. Out of sight, out of mind, right? Two weeks later his car broke down.

We have lights inside of us that go off when we know we’re moving into dangerous territory, don’t we? Our conscience, the God voice inside of us, will flash and say, “Whoa, be careful with that thought, that can be dangerous.” And we can choose to listen to this voice and deal with it, or we can put a piece of tape over it and hope it will go away. But if we do that, we have to be willing to accept the consequences.

King David learned this the hard way. As we learned last week, David decided to ignore the flashing lights and warning signs and give into his temptation and desire for Bathsheba. David’s desire led to adultery, which led to deception, which led to murder. Ultimately, the prophet Nathan confronted David about his sinful behavior, and David broke down and confessed his sin to God.

Do you remember what he said? He said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” That’s where the reading stopped last week. But the next line is an important one. Nathan responds to David by saying, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You’re not going to die.” You see, the penalty for David’s sin was death. David had broken God’s law. He had transgressed against the Lord. For his adultery, for his lies, for his murder, he deserved to die. But he found forgiveness in God; like us, he was a recipient of God’s grace. He was granted a new life.

But, that doesn’t mean he is free from the consequences of his sin. Nathan goes on to tell him that because of what he has done, his household will be thrown into turmoil and the child conceived out of wedlock will die. Those are the consequences David must face for the sins he has committed.

Now, some of us may be concerned about this. After all, God forgave David. God took away his sin. If that’s the case, why do these other things have to happen? There’s a

fundamental distinction to be drawn here. It's the distinction between punishment and consequences. David was spared from God's punishment for his sins, just as we are. Christ died on the cross to take away our punishment. He went to the electric chair on our behalf. But being saved from punishment doesn't mean we don't have to deal with the resulting implications of our sinful actions.

God has given us the freedom to choose how to live, but God has also set up moral boundaries within that freedom. And if we cross those boundaries, there are consequences. These aren't necessarily directly from God – God doesn't send down lightning bolts to smite us. Consequences are different than punishment. Consequences are the naturally playing out of our own sinful decisions. In Romans, when Paul is describing the actions of sinners, he says that God “gave them over” to their sinful behaviors. In other words, God let those sinful decisions and the resulting behaviors play themselves out to their destructive conclusions. I don't believe God enacts punishment when we sin; I believe the consequences of our sins are punishment enough. And there are always consequences.

I think we've been led to believe that if we simply confess our sins and claim God's forgiveness, then all the consequences of what we've done will be whisked away. It's the “carte blanche” theory I've heard people use to criticize Christianity, and it goes like this: If God promises to forgive you for whatever you do, why not just go out and do whatever you want? It's OK, because when you're done, you can just ask God for forgiveness and you'll get it.

Now, that theory is wrong on a number of different levels, including the fact that it doesn't take into account the consequences of those actions. God does not punish us, but God also does not rescue us. If I sin, and in the process of sinning break my arm, I can come to God with a genuinely repentant heart and receive forgiveness, but I still have to deal with my broken arm. God's not going to magically make that disappear.

That's what David learned. Because of his sinful actions, his family was torn apart and his life was turned upside down. First, the baby he conceived with Bathsheba died. Then David's son Ammon raped his half-sister Tamar. Tamar's brother, Absalom, another of David's sons, is so infuriated by this that he kills Ammon. Absalom flees Jerusalem, but then returns and sparks a conspiracy to overthrow his father David and take the throne. So then David flees and musters up an army to fight Absalom and recapture the throne. In the ensuing battle, Absalom is killed, which we read today, and David grieves, not only for the loss of his son, but for all that has happened in his house. You can almost feel David's pain in your heart as you hear him cry out for Absalom. It's the cry of a man who wishes he could turn back the clock and have a second chance to be a different kind of father and king. But he can't.

Consequences. Is it any wonder that the division in David's house included sexual immorality and murder? The old saying goes that, “The sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons.” David's boys learned to rape and murder from watching their father's actions. Our sins have consequences that go far beyond our control. Paul said it in Galatians: We reap what we sow. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction.

So what do we do about this? If we are imperfect people who commit sins, and there's no escaping our consequences, how do deal with them? I think there are two things we can do to help us with this.

The first thing we can do is change our perspective on dealing with sin. I don't want to downplay the importance of God's forgiveness, because that's a cornerstone of salvation and faith. But if we rely too much on God's forgiveness, we can fall into the trap of abdicating our responsibility as a Christian. Think of it this way: You're charged with teaching a new driver how to drive a car. On the first day of class, you say, "Today we're going to talk about your first crash. We'll learn how to contact the police and exchange insurance information."

Now, this is important information, right? But you don't want to start off talking about crashing. It's called corrective thinking. If we only focus on what happens after we've sinned, we miss the chance to help ourselves avoid sin in the first place.

The alternative to corrective thinking is preventative thinking. If you teach that driving class how to obey the rules of the road and how to put safety first, you greatly reduce their chances of getting into a crash. Similarly, if we can focus on how we can stay away from temptation and how we can use God's power to say No and avoid sinning, we can reduce our need to call on God's forgiveness. Had David practiced preventative thinking when he first saw Bathsheba, he wouldn't have needed to utter the corrective statement, "I have sinned against the Lord."

But nobody's perfect, right? We can't always avoid crashing, and the time will come when we are in need of God's forgiveness and have to lie in the bed we've made. So the second thing we can do when facing our consequences is just that: face them. We can't run from them or avoid them or try to sweeten them up. That would only get us into more trouble. The best we can do is confess to God, receive God's forgiveness, and then trust that God is beside us as we walk through the valley.

God was with David, even as he watched his family unravel. After her first child died, his wife Bathsheba gave birth to another son named Solomon, who would go on to continue David's reign and would build the first temple dedicated to God. Despite the mess we can make of our lives, God can work through all situations – even those we bring upon ourselves – to bring about His good will, if we turn to Him and ask His forgiveness. I believe that part of receiving God's grace means that God, in forgiving us, gives us the strength to endure the consequences and will help us learn from them. Thanks be to God for his everlasting grace, which gives us the courage to face whatever future holds for us.